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China's new map draws outrage from its neighbors

The latest edition of China's official national map lays claim to almost all of the South China Sea and contested areas along its land border with India. Cue fierce backlash from neighboring countries.

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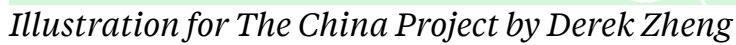
A green horizontal bar with a white line drawing of a map outline, likely representing the South China Sea or a similar region.

Illustration for The China Project by Derek Zheng

The Philippines has joined India, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Taiwan in the list of countries that have opposed China's new national map.

“This latest attempt to legitimize China's purported sovereignty and jurisdiction over Philippine features and maritime zones has no basis under international law, particularly the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS),” Philippines' Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Ma. Teresita Daza **said in a statement** today.

On August 28, China's Ministry of Natural Resources **released** a new version of its national map, which it has regularly done so since at least 2006 **in an effort** to “eliminate ‘problem maps.’”



*The 2023 edition of China's standard map from the Ministry of Natural Resources.
Image via Global Times.*

China's new map clearly depicts the "nine-dash line" — a territorial claim to most of the South China Sea that is based on a map published in 1947 by the Republic of China government of the KMT, which was then based in Nanjing. In July 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague **passed down a**



were groundless. But a growing number of Chinese vessels have sailed within, and sometimes beyond, the nine-dash line over the past few years, often igniting fierce objections from the six neighboring countries that also lay claim to those waters.

Vietnam “resolutely rejects any claims in the East Sea by China that are based on the dashed line,” Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Pham Thu Hang **said in a statement** today.

Earlier in the day, Malaysia rejected the map based on China’s “unilateral maritime claims” to almost the entire South China Sea, “which extends into Malaysian maritime area,” its foreign ministry **said in a statement**: “The map has no binding effect on Malaysia.” The nine-dash line also includes disputed waters in Sabah and Sarawak off the coast of Malaysian Borneo.

The map also reiterated China’s claim over Taiwan and its outlying islands, which fall within the scope of the U-shaped line. “Taiwan, the Republic of China, is a sovereign and independent country and is not affiliated with the People’s Republic of China,” Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs **said**.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wāng Wénbīn 汪文斌 **yesterday stated** that the map was “a routine practice in China’s exercise of sovereignty in accordance with the law.”

“We hope relevant sides can stay objective and calm, and refrain from overinterpreting the issue,” Wang added.

A tense land border with India

On August 29, India became the **first to lodge** a “strong protest” with China over the new map, which shows the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh and the contested Aksai Chin plateau as part of China’s territory.



standing territorial dispute between the two countries, which escalated to new heights after the deadly clashes between their militaries in the Galwan Valley in 2020.

“We reject these claims as they have no basis. Such steps by the Chinese side only complicate the resolution of the boundary question,” Indian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi **said yesterday**.

India's anger over China's new map has jettisoned recent efforts to stabilize fraught ties. Less than a week earlier, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xí Jìnpíng 习近平 **had a rare face-to-face meeting** in South Africa, where they agreed to “intensify efforts” to deescalate border tensions. On August 13–14, Indian and Chinese defense officials **held their 19th round of talks** to resolve their border issue, though they did little to ease tensions.

The fresh dispute also comes before a potential meeting between Modi and Xi at the G20 summit in New Delhi next week – which Xi **has not committed to attending** as of yet.



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